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There's No Place like Home: Or is there?
Study Abroad Reentry

By
Kelsey Gray

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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Western Oregon University
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There's No Place like Home: Or is there? Study Abroad Reentry

In 2012, The Institute of International Education (IIE) reported that U.S. student participation in study abroad has more than tripled over the past two decades (IIE, 2012). During the 1990's, U.S. students studying abroad grew from 50,000 in 1985 to 140,000 in 2000. Despite changes in foreign relations and the American economy, the popularity of study abroad has continued to grow (IIE, 2012). Study abroad has been on the rise for many years because it holds many benefits for students. A semester, year, or any segment of time in a different culture can impact a student's worldview, cultural understanding, and their scope of experience. As this experience has become more common, study abroad has become a topic of interest in the psychology field. Study abroad includes many complex psychological processes; this research will focus on the activity of reentry into one's home culture as a focal point to examine several of these processes.

Study Abroad Growth and Changes

In order to have better insight into the specific topic of reentry, one must have a sound understanding of the broader topic of study abroad. Study abroad began "when overseas travel became more accessible through advanced technology, infrastructure, and communication, and tourism boomed as an industry" (Williamson, 2010), and has since gone through many changes. This section will provide a description of the meaning of student sojourns and the changes many programs have undergone in the last few decades, and how these might impact students.

One significant change has been the typical duration of one's stay abroad. For

example in 2012, 56.6% of students studied abroad for eight weeks or less, 39.4% studied abroad for two quarters or one semester, and only 3.9% participated in an academic or calendar year long trip (IIE, 2012). As Savicki explains, “The ‘traditional’ junior year abroad has been augmented by semester-long, month-long, weeklong experiences” (2008). This could impact students in a number of ways, especially the amount of time they have available to become acculturated. Understanding and getting used to one’s surrounding culture takes time. Since the time span to adapt is often shorter, students have less time to go through this process. With a minimized time span, students may also feel a rush to experience everything there is to experience in their country of sojourn. While travelling, students have:

“undergone a subtle, perhaps unacknowledged acculturation... including the acquisition of foreign knowledge or skills which may or may not be concurrent with personal and social expectations. He or she is subject to distortions of memory over time and is faced with unforeseen changes at home” (Westwood *et al.*, 1986, p. 224)

As one can imagine, speeding up this process can make things even more overwhelming, and difficulties in acculturation could lead to a lack of processing, which could cause additional confusion and complications in reentry.

More students have also been studying abroad, thus making its effects a more relevant issue. In 1996, Sudduth offered “Statistics show that the number of American undergraduate and graduate students studying abroad for credit has almost doubled over the last decade, to more than 89,242” (1996). One reason more students are going abroad is the affordability of it. Many universities have campuses in different countries,

or sister schools which have comparable tuition. When travelling was less common for students, it was often due to high prices. But now because it is more affordable, more students are doing it. Sudduth states “the luxury has become so democratized...that many students going abroad are from relatively inexpensive state universities.” (1996). As study abroad has become more accessible to students, more experiences are available because of the larger population, and the process of reentry becomes more a more relevant and important issue.

Another important feature to consider is the way that educators and students understand study abroad today. Educators generally see it in three different ways: purely academic, experiential, and developmental (Selby, 2008). The academic sees study abroad the same as any other semester- the goals are the same as they might be on a syllabus. Some educators of this school of thought even see study abroad as a “blow-off” semester. The experiential perspective argues that being in a certain geographic area gives additional perspective on academics. The experience of being abroad is valued when it leads students to the original objective of having a deeper understanding of the academic material. The developmental perspective emphasizes the student’s maturation and identity formation, “acknowledging that student maturation accelerates abroad as learners are surrounded by other points of view and have to come to terms with their own core values and identity” (Selby, 2008). Research shows that the developmental perspective is the one that students most often relate to. When one study asked students to reflect upon their personal growth, “97 percent said studying abroad served as a catalyst for increased maturity, 96 percent reported increased self-confidence, 89 percent said that it enabled them to tolerate ambiguity,

and 95 percent stated that it has had a lasting impact on their world view” (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

For students, study abroad can be a life-transforming event. Students have an experience of seeing themselves in a new way through the lens of their host culture, and this view offers a new sense of self. Compromising these views with the former views of the self is an existential experience, leading students to ask themselves “If I matter, or if I did, if I mattered in a manner that mattered to me. I had to reconstruct and affirm my new identities” (Selby, 2008). Aside from learning and experiencing a new culture, the goal of students in studying abroad is often to further discover who they are, make lifelong memories and embark on an adventure. Studying abroad indubitably builds on these goals, and leaves students with much to learn from and ponder. Evaluating the achievement or disappointment of these goals is part of what makes reentry such a complex process.

Acculturative Stress, Culture Shock, and Reentry

Several processes are associated with the transitions experienced in study abroad. When one enters a new culture, adjustments must be made to that new culture. Catering to the study abroad population, Labrack thoroughly defines culture:

“Culture is a neutral term, neither good nor bad, and refers to the broadest conception about the learned knowledge that humans use to fulfill their needs and wants. It refers to the collective historical patterns, values, societal arrangements, manners, ideas, and ways of living that people have used to order their society. It is comprised of all those things we learn as part of growing up including language, religion, beliefs about economic and social relations, political

organization and legitimacy, and the thousands of "Do's and Don'ts" society deems important that we know to become a functioning member of that group"(2003).

Since culture is a complex, far-ranging entity that often goes unexplained, making these adjustments can vary greatly in difficulty and length of adjustment period. Culture greatly plays into one's psychological health and processing while travelling. This study will use the concept of Cultural Distance to address the level of adjustment necessary upon entering a country of sojourn. Kogut and Singh's model of cultural distance considers the variables of time orientation, career success versus relationship success, power distance, and individualism versus collectivism (1988). In this study, the Cultural Distance measurement will be used to operationalize the cultural difference between the place of sojourn and the United States.

One important psychological facet of any type of travel, and therefore study abroad, is culture shock. Culture shock is essentially feelings of disorientation upon entering a culture different from one's own.

One study states:

Moving from one social environment to another requires individuals to change both their perceptions of the world and their actions upon it. This can be a truly profound experience, nothing less than the destruction of one world and the construction of another, formerly unknown and unexpected. The change demands that the individual assume new ways of coping and communicating.

This experience, while it can be exhilarating, often is felt as unpleasant or disagreeable. (Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986)

Upon arriving in their country of sojourn travelling students must adapt. This is where the process of acculturation comes into play. Acculturation occurs when “different cultures experience continuous contact with one another, leading to subsequent changes in one or both of these cultures” (Berry, 1989). Making these adjustments and changes can certainly be difficult. The difficulty associated with this transition is called acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is inversely correlated with psychological and physical well-being (Berry, 1998; Berry & Kim, 1988; Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 1992, as cited in Kotic, 2004).

For the purposes of evaluating study abroad, we must look at these concepts from the standpoint of the individual. Students are placed into cultures most often with small groups or as an individual, and must find ways to cope with acculturation, culture shock, and resulting acculturative stress. If acculturation occurs, the student will begin to meld their home culture with their culture abroad. After a short time, some students become so comfortable with their surrounding customs that they forget this is not all they have experienced. They bond with their new friends and count them as close as those at their home university. They embrace the culture, food, and environment as their own. This adaptation to host culture and experience certainly enhances ones time abroad but presents students with additional challenges upon returning home. In fact, “‘culture shock’, is paralleled in the case of the individual returning home from abroad... ‘reverse culture shock’”(Westwood *et al.*, 1986). It is important to recognize that both culture shock and reverse culture shock are continuous processes. Gaw defines

reverse culture shock as “the process of readjusting, reacculturating, and reassimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time”(2004).

Many students encounter difficult transitions back into their original, home environments. This experience entails many psychological and emotional adjustments. Although it is a foil to culture shock in many ways, Ward argues, it is important to view returning home –“as one form of cultural adjustment... and understand how this process is similar to and different from adjusting to life in a foreign culture” (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). It is argued that reentry stands apart, too unique of an experience to be solely reverse culture shock. Selby also offers “the letdown of ‘reentry shock’ is not mere reverse culture shock, but rather the tedious task of having to question all one’s prior experience, including the reconstruction of one’s own self-image, within the context of multiple new insights” (2008, p 6). Thus, the reverse-culture shock experience for the university population has been deemed Study Abroad Reentry Adjustment.

Westwood *et al.* (1986) define reentry as:

“the continuum of experience and behaviors which are encountered when an individual returns to a place of origin after having been immersed in another context for a period of time sufficient to cause some degree of mental and emotional adjustment prior to optimal functioning in the ‘new’ environment” (p. 223).

Reentry has been linked to establishment of personal identity, a greater understanding of one's worldview and experiences, and a great array of emotions, including depression with “levels of grief symptoms not dissimilar to

those experiencing grief through bereavement” (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006).

Other writers have described reentry as “temporal psychological difficulties returnees experience in the initial stage of the adjustment process at home after having lived abroad for some time” (Uehara, 1986). Many other studies give evidence for reentry as a challenging process. When studying a group of students who travelled to New Zealand, Chamove found that statistically “over half the returnees found it challenging coming back to New Zealand after a year living in another country.... Those for whom return was difficult experienced considerable psychological distress” (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006). Chamove’s was the study which found some returner’s stress to be equal to the turmoil of losing a loved one. Sahin’s study in 1990 found that one in three of Turkish travelers regretted returning home and experienced difficulty upon reentry. Uehara also found that “in a minority of cases psychological symptoms reach clinical proportions” (1986). These studies support the idea that there is something psychologically unique about reentry.

Reentry is a complex and fascinating phenomenon recently drawing attention from psychological researchers. This thesis will investigate emerging themes in existing research on reentry, and conduct research to evaluate emotional and behavioral aspects of reentry.

Existing Research

The W-Curve

A popular model of intercultural adjustment is the U-curve. This model

focuses on initial adjustment upon entering a culture of sojourn. Lyssgard, one of the psychologists who first described the U-curve, explains:

“Adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a “crisis” in which one feels less well-adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community.” (Lysgaard, 1955, p. 50)

The stages of the U-curve are referred to as honeymoon, culture shock, recovery, and adjustment, with time as the crucial variable. Oberg (1960) also developed a hypothesis which could be graphically represented as a U-curve. Oberg described a variety of negative emotions that individuals experience while sojourning, but also asserted that over time individuals will become accustomed to the culture and reach a point of enjoyment and relative ease (Oberg, 1960). The U-curve has been extended into a W-curve to include reentry, to accommodate for the concept that “those reentering their own culture after an extended period in a foreign culture pass through a second U-curve in readjusting, thus forming a W-curve” (Webb, 1983). The second U includes a honeymoon at home, crisis at home, recovery at home, and adjustment at home (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

The W-curve makes logical sense, and when the present study asked students, many replied that they identified with the model. However, in several studies researchers have found that this U-curve was accepted without significant data. Upon conducting a longitudinal study, they found that only 3/68 students experienced the U-curve formula (Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998). They concluded that

“adjustment is unlikely to follow a U-curve; rather psychological distress would be anticipated to be at its peak on entry to a new culture” (Ward *et al.*, 1998). Additionally, Lysgaard’s data is largely cross-sectional and retrospective, while Oberg’s is largely anecdotal; there is little data behind the theories. The U-curve and W-curve have also been unjustly extended to other issues such as academic success while abroad, host relationships, and cultural perspectives (Ward *et al.*, 1998).

Also, with time as the crucial variable (Brein & David, 1971), this model cannot be applied to a variety of sojourns. Many of the graphic representations show the crisis occurring at 3 months, and the adjustment at 6 months. As previously discussed, the length of study abroad varies greatly and can be as short as one week, making the temporally based W-curve not applicable to all trips. Also, the foundation on time does not allow for individual differences. It assumes that every traveler follows the continuum at the same rate. Additionally, both curves of the W-curve are the same shape and magnitude, eluding that the sojourner must experience the various stages at the same degree while abroad and while returning home.

Regarding previous writings, the issue of interest in the present study is the lack of detail in the W-curve hypothesis, especially regarding the second U, reentry. This study will strive to add details to the literature available on reentry. Outside of the W-curve theory, other research also shows a dearth of detail, especially on the link between emotions and readaptation.

Lack of Detail in Literature

While theories about reentry exist, few data have been recorded, and the data that do exist do not cover a variety of reentry features. Many journalists identify

hypothesized emotional experiences of returners. Westwood *et al.* state that “travelers may experience intense anxieties and fears. Feelings of isolation, rejection, frustration, and homesickness result from these anxieties”(1986). Although these emotions are possible and probable, evidence hasn’t confirmed their presence convincingly. Ward also states that typically experienced difficulties are “communicating with friends, dealing with stereotypes, uncertainty over cultural identity, social withdrawal, and decreased relationship satisfaction” (Ward *et al.*, 2001, 163) and that emotional struggles can include physical stress, anxiety, apathy, and feelings of loneliness and loss. These findings were supported with evidence using the Personal Problems Inventory, and though this does provide some hard data, it doesn’t provide a detailed account of what students experience. Some studies have focused solely on behavioral aspects, such as dating problems, alcohol problems, and conflicts with parents, while others have focused solely on feelings of anxiety and depression.

To sum it up, there is some data available on reentry, but few studies examine what specifically is difficult for students. Exactly which emotions and behavioral difficulties do returnees experience, and to what degree? Through quantitative and qualitative methods, the present study will strive to answer this question and understand reentry from the student’s point of view.

Purpose

It is important to understand the impact of studying abroad on a deeper level so that we can learn more about the experience and learn how students can be better supported. Without an increased knowledge of reentry, this goal cannot be reached. The current study will aim to fill in that blank. Few studies have combined behavioral

and emotional aspects to evaluate what goes on beyond the surface. Researching these factors cohesively across a group of students will provide a new way to look at reentry and the experiences it entails. This will be a descriptive study to gather data on feelings experienced and behaviors exhibited by students, and to evaluate if these factors show psychological themes for reentry.

Research Hypotheses

Based on available literature, observations, and analytical thought, two hypotheses have been made. It is hypothesized that:

1. Students who have more difficulty in behavioral reentry adjustment will experience less positive and more negative emotions.
2. The greater cultural distance between home country and country of sojourn, the more difficult the reentry adjustment.

Methods

This study will use both quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine facets of reentry.

Quantitative Methods

Participants

Participants were 81 university students ranging from ages 18-26 who had spent time studying abroad. There were 68 females and 13 males. The focus was on students whose home country is the United States. It was decided to focus on one country because there could be many confounds between cultural values, university systems, and socio-economic standards. The United States was chosen because of accessibility

and it is the country the researcher has the most knowledge of. Demographic information was taken regarding factors which play into reentry and the specific research hypotheses mentioned earlier. Places of sojourn included a large variety of countries in Europe, Asia, Central and South America, Australia, and Africa. The average length of sojourn was 11.3 weeks, with a standard deviation of 7.2 weeks. The average length of time passed since returning to the United States was 36.4 with a standard deviation of 38.7 weeks. The average cultural distance, calculated using Kogut and Singh's cultural distance model (1988), was 12.82. The distribution of cultural distances can be seen in the appendix, figure 7. The average perceived positiveness of the study abroad experience was 89.7. Detailed demographics, along with the survey, may be found in the appendix.

Materials

Two measures were used in this study: A measurement modeled after the Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) and a modified Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988). The Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale is an evaluation of behavior, while PANAS is an evaluation of mood states. These measurements were presented on one survey.

Reentry Scale. The Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale is usually used to measure individual's adjustment upon entering a country of sojourn. Most research using this measurement evaluates culture shock. Because this study is addressing reentry, which is likened to reverse-culture shock, the tool needed to be adjusted accordingly. Several questions were pulled from the SCAS and minimally modified to fit reentry. For example, the original SCAS contains the item 'getting used to the pace of life'. This was

changed to 'leaving the pace of life in study abroad country'. Some questions on the modified tool were original because they are issues unique to reentry, such as 'accepting your experience had ended'. The survey matches the SCAS in structure as every item begins with a verb, thus describing a behavioral response. The Reentry Scale had a Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency score of .865.

The Reentry Scale was completed first. The directions instructed the participant to reflect on their behaviors during the reentry transition. A five point Likert scale was used to evaluate student difficulty with the item with 1 = Very slightly or not at all, to 5 = Extremely. This portion consisted of 15 items and will be referred to as the Reentry Scale, see appendix figure 2.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale was completed next, also on a five point Likert scale and containing 20 items. The original PANAS contains 20 items. The PANAS was kept mostly intact because it has been so widely used and accepted, and provides a very thorough look at one's moods and feelings. Six additional items in the same form as PANAS items were added to assess specific reentry issues (e.g. "disconnected"), and several were removed which were not as applicable to reentry. Substitution of positive and negatively toned items is consistent with the PANAS scale rationale in that it is the overall positive or negative valence that was important to the scale developers, rather than specific individual emotions (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). See PANAS scale, appendix figure 3. The positive affect measures had a Cronbach's Alpha of .791, and the negative affect measures had a Cronbach's Alpha of .828.

Procedures

The survey questionnaire was delivered to returning study abroad students in one of two ways. First, a paper and pencil version was delivered during meetings of reentry students who were participating in a reentry program (e.g. class, workshop, informational meeting). These questionnaires were introduced and collected by the primary investigator, or the individual responsible for conducting the program. Second, an identical on-line survey was available to returning students from geographically distant colleges and universities. The on-line version was available through WOU. Responses from both data collection formats were combined. The sample was a convenience sample, not randomized.

Measures

Additional measures included a Positiveness Scale, a 100 point scale with anchors. The item instructed students as follows:

Using the following scale, please choose a number from 1 to 100 to rate your overall study abroad experience. 1= Extremely negative, 25=Somewhat Negative, 50=Neutral, 75=Somewhat positive, 100=Extremely positive.

Demographic, and other information regarding study abroad and reentry were collected. Age, gender, class standing, duration of sojourn, duration of return, country of sojourn, level of fluency in host country language, living situation abroad, participation in formal reentry activity, and enrollment affiliation (i.e. enrolled with students from home university or students from home geographic region, or enrolled independently).

Cultural Distance was calculated using Kogut and Singh's model (1988). This formula calculates cultural distance from the United States. The variable I_{jj} stands for the cultural dimension of the country of interest, V is the variance for the cultural

dimension, U represents the United States, and CD_1 is the cultural distance from the United States. See formula below.

$$CD_j = \sum_{i=1}^4 \{(I_{ij} - I_{iu})^2 / V_{ij}\} / 4 ,$$

Qualitative Methods

Participants

Participants were 10 university students who had studied abroad and returned within the last two years. Their trip lengths ranged from 26 days to 11 months with a mean of 17 weeks. The locations in which the interviewees studied abroad were Spain, Germany, England, New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, South Korea, Greece, one participant was enrolled in the Semester at Sea program which toured Central America, and one participant studied domestically at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., a deaf university. Participants ages ranged from 20-27, four were junior class standing and 6 were seniors. Their average rating of the positiveness of their experience was 90.

Materials

The qualitative portion consisted of a one-on-one interview. The questions were created by the researcher. The questions aimed to gather information about how difficult reentry was for each individual and what was difficult about it. Experienced emotions, reflection on the sojourn, and personal change were also addressed. Each interviewee was asked every listed question, but the interviews followed a semi-structured format so that other relevant items that came up could be discussed. The interview outline with questions can be found in the appendix in figure four.

Procedure

Interviewees were recruited through reentry sessions and seeking others who had studied abroad. The researcher would first ask the participant to share where their trip was, what they did, and how long they had been back. Interviewees completed the same demographics as survey participants. Interviews were recorded on the researcher's computer using recording software, and later reviewed and transcribed by the researcher. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 40 minutes. Quotations and references to the interviews will be interweaved in the discussion section.

Results

The results of the quantitative research revealed some complexities in the research. This included support of hypothesis one, interesting patterns in the adapted PANAS and Reentry scale, and several unexpected correlations and a moderator effect.

Adapted PANAS Review

The adapted PANAS items (see figure 1) had a wide range of means, with strength of emotions ranging from a score of 1.3 to 3.8. The most intensely experienced emotions were accepted, inspired, excited, joyful, interested, proud, and distracted. Given the literature on "reentry shock" it was unexpected that students identified strongly with so many positive emotions. The least experienced emotions were nervous, ashamed, guilty, and unaccepted. These were some of the most negative mood states.

To evaluate how mood states of students in reentry compare with average students, the reentry PANAS results were compared with the sample of college students who completed the survey when the PANAS was developed. This comparison,

shown in figure 2, demonstrates that in reentry, negative affect was slightly higher than for the norm population, but that positive affect is about the same. This shows that for most students, reentry is difficult, but not extremely so. Further explanation and analysis of the PANAS results will be included in the discussion.

Figure 1, PANAS results based on means.

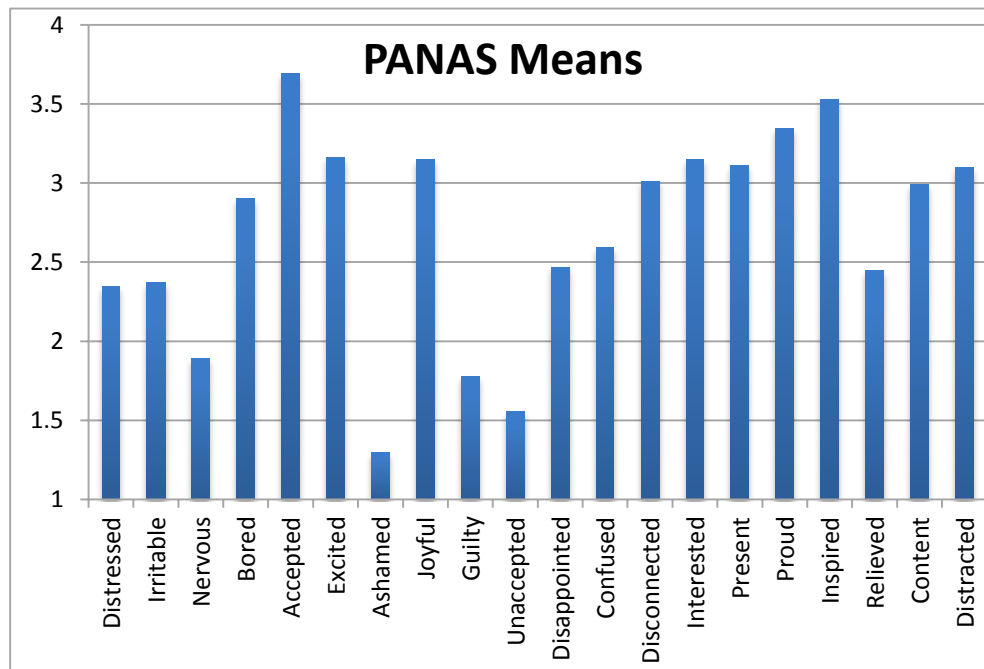
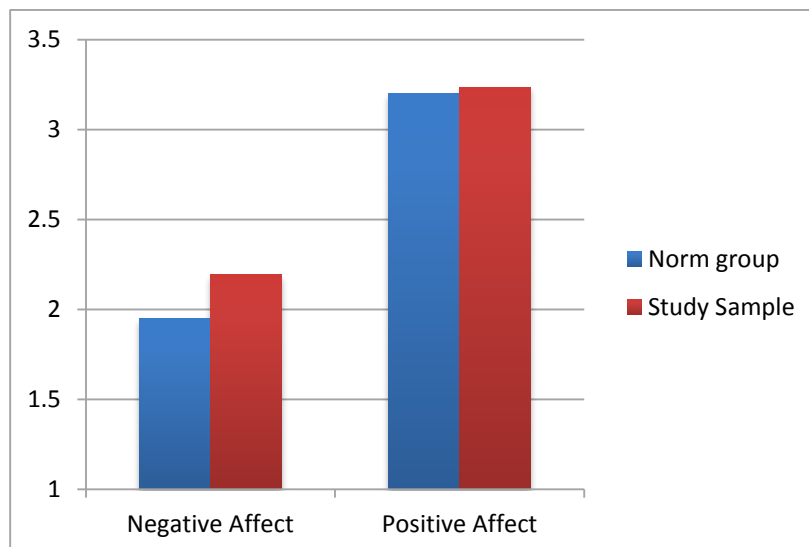


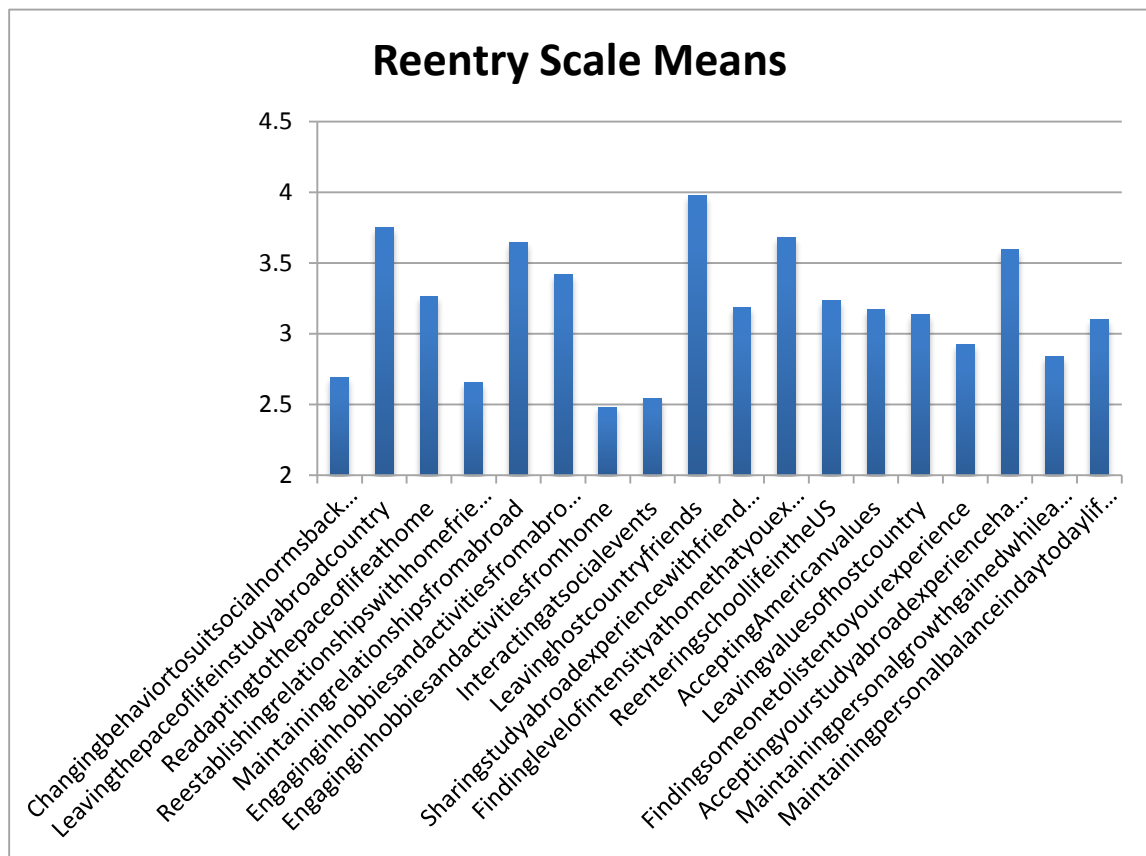
Figure 2, PANAS norm and Reentry comparison.



Reentry Scale Review

Reentry scale results showed a less variation between means than the adapted PANAS, with the mean scores ranging from 2.5 to 3.9, see figure 3 below. The highest experienced difficulties were leaving the pace of life of the study abroad country, maintaining relationships from abroad, leaving host country friends, and accepting the study abroad experience had ended. The difficulties rated less straining were adapting behavior to social norms back home, adapting to the pace of life at home, engaging in hobbies and activities from home, and interacting at social events. The difficulties in the Reentry Scale results seem to fall into two categories- loss of the study abroad experience and adjustment to home life. This will be examined in the discussion.

Figure 3, Reentry results by means.



Hypothesis 1. Reentry Difficulty and Affect.

Hypothesis 1 was tested by correlating reentry difficulty and, the positive mood states and negative mood states of the PANAS. A series of pearson correlational analyses were performed on the data to assess the relationship between Negative Affect and Reentry Difficulty, see table 1. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between Negative Affect and Reentry Difficulty $r = -.598$, ($p < .01$), and a statistically significant inverse relationship between Positive Affect and Reentry Difficulty, $r = -.449$, ($p < .01$). Put simply, students with more reentry difficulty experienced more negative moods, while students with less reentry difficulty experienced more positive moods. The main hypothesis of linking reentry difficulty to emotions is supported.

Table 1. Variable means, standard deviations, and correlations.

Research									
Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Reentry Scale	3.182	0.675							
2 Positive Affect	3.174	0.691	-.426**						
3 Negative Affect	2.301	0.683	.598**	-.406**					
4 Cultural									
Distance	12.386	7.402	.186	-.063	.208				
5 Language									
Fluency	2.296	1.699	.005	.056	-.071	-.494**			
6 Study Abroad	15.383	8.027	.130	-.218	.141	-.085	.103		

Length									
7 Reentry Length	36.432	30.267	.137	.057	-.008	.006	.304**	.205	
8 Study Abroad									
Positiveness	88.037	14.729	.374**	-.145	.062	.142	.037	-.168	.093

** p< .01

Hypothesis 2, Cultural Distance and Reentry difficulty.

The correlation between Cultural Distance and Reentry difficulty was not significant, ($r=.058$). Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Other Correlations.

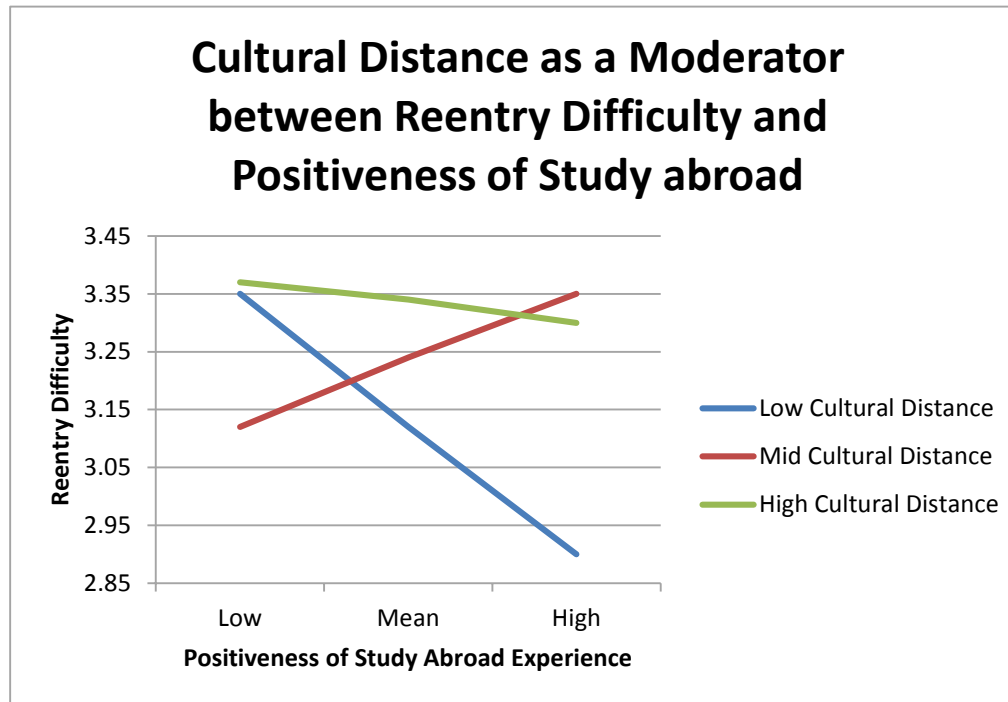
There were several correlations of interest discovered between other research variables that were not included in the main research hypotheses. Also, some variables that might be expected to have correlations did not, such as study abroad length and reentry difficulty, and study abroad length and fluency. Cultural distance and perceived positiveness of the experience also did not have a significant correlation.

There was a significant correlation between Cultural Distance and Language Fluency, $r=-.494$, ($p<.01$). Results show that students have more fluency in less Culturally Distant countries. A relationship was also found between Reentry Difficulty and Perceived Positiveness of study abroad experience, ($r=.374$, $p<.01$), as well as Positive Affect and Perceived Positiveness, ($r= -.235$, $p<.01$). This means that those who had a highly positive experience had a more difficult Reentry, and that those who had a more positive study abroad experience had less positive moods upon reentry.

Moderator Effect

The pattern of relationships between reentry difficulty and positiveness was puzzling. There seemed to be contradictions in which variables did and did not correlate regarding positiveness, cultural distance, and reentry difficulty. In order to investigate further a moderation analysis was conducted following Baron and Kenny's methodology (1986). A moderation effect was found in which cultural distance of the study abroad country moderated the relationship between perceived positiveness of the study abroad experience and difficulties during reentry. The first order positive correlation between perceived positiveness and reentry difficulties ($r = .374, p < .001$) was influenced dramatically by cultural distance (interaction $\beta = -.320, p < .003$). Figure 4 graphing the moderation effect was developed using the methodology suggested by Aiken and West (1981). When cultural distance was low (e.g. in New Zealand, Australia, and U.K.), positiveness of the experience was inversely related to reentry difficulties. When cultural distance was high (e.g. in Korea, Central America, and Ghana), difficulty was high regardless of positiveness. When cultural distance was moderate (e.g. in Spain, France, and Germany), difficulty was positively related to positiveness. The effect of cultural distance helped to explain some of the complexities of the relationship between reentry difficulties and perceived positiveness of the study abroad experience, see figure 4 below.

Figure 4, moderator effect.



Although the main hypothesis of reentry difficulty and affect was supported, there was an unexpected level of complexity that emerged through multiple unexpected correlations. Further exploration of these correlations, and possible reasons why they occurred, will be offered in the discussion.

Discussion

While clarifying and exploring connections made through statistical analyses, the discussion section will also rely on interviews as a qualitative data source to enrich quantitative findings.

Primary Hypothesis

The primary hypothesis that those who experience more difficulty in reentry would have a more negative affect was supported. It makes logical sense that when going through a difficult life event or transition, one might have more negative moods. Many of

the factors on the Reentry Scale which participants identified with are commonly associated with negative moods, such as disconnection from loved ones (maintaining relationships from abroad and leaving host country friends), life transitions (adapting to the pace of life at home and leaving the pace of life abroad), and the passing of an exciting event (finding level of intensity at home, accepting study abroad experience had ended). If these issues are especially difficult for a student, their mood is negatively affected. Generally, those who are struggling are more likely to experience negative moods (Beck, 1983, as cited in Emmons, 1991).

The inverse of the primary hypothesis was also supported; students who experienced less difficulty in reentry had a more positive affect. One interviewee reflected this less difficult reentry and positive affect:

“I was really excited to get home; on the plane ride I didn’t even care I was going to be on a plane for 24 hours. Saying, its fine, I get to go to America... Once I got home I was so happy.”

This finding falls into the logic and explanation of the previous finding quite easily. When not experiencing difficulties, people tend to have more positive emotions. However, it is important to recognize here that correlation is not causation. Mood could impact reentry struggles as much as reentry struggles impact mood, or perhaps students going through a difficult reentry had negative moods for reasons not related to reentry. Though the correlation is significant, it is not inferable that reentry difficulty causes mood states.

Cultural Distance

The reason for the correlation between language fluency and cultural distance is clear; countries which speak English tend to be less culturally distant from the United States. For example, the cultural distance of Australia is .11, New Zealand's is 1.4, and England's is .4. One outlier which does not conform to this pattern is Kenya, where English is spoken but the cultural distance is 19.4.

The relationship between reentry difficulties and cultural distance is fascinating. Though not a significant correlation at the standard .05 level, the correlation barely misses this standard at .208, $p < .073$. Additionally, the relationship is a factor in the moderation effect described earlier. It is possible that this link is due to some of the factors that cultural distance accounts for. These factors are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, quality of life versus career success, and time orientation. One student described her struggles as being related to cultural adjustments like "pace of living... understanding accents, I come home and I'm using expressions that people don't understand here". To exemplify how a vastly different culture might play into reentry issues, we examine individualism versus collectivism. When asked what her biggest adjustment was upon returning home, one student studying in Central America, a highly collectivist country, responded "having to deal with people's attitudes and values that are different than Central America." If a student spends several months as part of a strongly collectivist family and community, they become accustomed to the high levels of interdependence and support. They may come to find their identity in the community unit rather than in their personal traits. When returning to the United States, they would be met with the harsh realities of

individualism: a low level of community interdependence, finding support only from closest relationships, and identities found in personal success, traits, and beliefs. In this situation, a student would not only have to deal with the loss of the community experienced abroad, but also possibly need to restructure their identity and behaviors to an individualistic culture. Students may experience the negative mood states of distress, confusion, and disconnection while making these adjustments.

Connections can easily be drawn to the other factors of the cultural distance measurement, but there are also other links to be made. In the literature, and in the interviews conducted in the present study, many students express strong negative emotions when experiencing poverty abroad. Poverty tends to occur in countries more culturally distant from the United States. For example, Honduras, which has 60% of its population living below the poverty line, has a cultural distance of 23.9. Many other countries follow this trend, so it is highly possible that factors like poverty are negatively affecting student's moods upon their return. When seeing poverty abroad, students may make decisions to live more simply or to give more of their wealth to others. However when returning to the United States they will quickly be immersed in a culture of materialism. The clash between the values of their home culture and the new values and perspective they established while abroad may cause distress.

Another factor which may play into the relationship between cultural distance and negative affect is the similarity of experience. If a student spends time abroad in Australia, for example, when they return home they will experience the same language and many of the same interests and cultural characteristics as they did abroad. It will be easy for them to connect their study abroad experience to their life at home. Cognitively,

this could prevent confusion and disconnect, and emotionally, will help them avoid the struggle of feeling like their trip never happened. A more similar culture may make it easier to share the experience with others, since they are more able to relate.

Now imagine if a student spent time abroad in Africa. There is not much in common between Africa and the United States on the cultural dimensions mentioned earlier. Upon their return, they will need to readjust to the customs of the United States. They most likely will not find the same language or many of the traditions they experienced abroad. Their living situation and how time is spent will probably be very different. Clearly, many adjustments will need to be made, and a more difficult reentry (with more adjustments) is correlated with negative affect. Because their experience abroad was so unique, a student who travelled to Africa is unlikely to find someone at home who understands and can relate to their experience. The fact that the student's home life does not have much in common with their life abroad will likely cause some disconnection between their time abroad and home, and they may feel like their trip never happened. One student describes his experience of a surreal feeling upon returning home from six weeks in Spain:

"The first few days I definitely felt that way [that it was surreal], by the third day I'd already fully settled in to my day to day life, it just felt like it hadn't really happened. When I looked at pictures and videos and talked to friends on facebook its proof that it happened- that tangible stuff can make it seem real. If we were in a time where we had only memory it would have just felt like a wonderful dream."

As students settle back into their normal life, which has little connection with a culturally diverse, exciting experience, they may experience this disconnect. This could

be related to a more negative affect. After spending 6 months living at a different pace of life in a more adventurous lifestyle, students describes that disappointment and disconnect, “I felt so energized and so many things I wanted to do and explore, and everyone here was exactly the same and I was so completely different”, and “I felt like a totally different person disassociated with what was going on. I didn’t feel like I was supposed to be here [at home].” The emotions entailed in this feeling can be confusing and distressing, contributing to a negative affect. Related to this idea of lack of similarity of experience is the process of adjusting to different customs. One interviewee relates her experience of adjusting to social customs upon reentry:

My biggest adjustment was [relearning how to] smile at people- nobody smiles at people on the street in Germany...If someone smiles at you, you think they want something more from you. Unless you’re friends don’t smile at someone on the street. At first it was hard to get used to because everyone looks so angry-but once you talk to them you see they’re not. It just became natural [to not smile]. When I came back here my mom said “you’ve become really good at not smiling”. Sometimes still I find myself walking along, people smile at me and I think “what are you doing, I don’t know you”. That was a cultural thing I wasn’t expecting. Sometimes [back at home] I don’t smile at people then I want to run back and say “No! Have a good day, I meant to smile!”

While this student’s challenge may not have been emotionally straining, it does exhibit the impact of changing customs which were adapted abroad. The relationship between cultural distance and negative affect and the moderation effect was unexpected and is still being explored, but can be partially explained by issues like

collectivism versus individualism, poverty, and disconnection from home experience. As cultural distance is one of the factors involved, this relationship can also be further explained by the moderator effect.

Cultural Distance and Moderator Effect

Results show that the relationship between perceived positiveness of the study abroad experience and reentry difficulty changes as a function of cultural distance. In other words, the effect of perceived positiveness on reentry difficulty varies linearly with respect to cultural distance. To illustrate the moderator effect graphically, three levels of cultural distance were charted: high, medium, and low.

When cultural distance was low, positiveness of the experience was inversely related to reentry difficulties. So, when students sojourned in a country more similar to the United States, a more positive experience made for a less difficult reentry, and a less positive experience made for a more difficult reentry.

When cultural distance was moderate, difficulty was positively related to positiveness. When a student studied in a country requiring moderate cultural adjustments, the more positive their experience was the more difficult their reentry.

When cultural distance was high, difficulty was high regardless of positiveness. When a student studied abroad in a culture vastly different than the United States, positiveness had no effect on reentry difficulty- reentry was difficult across the board.

Based on other correlations, interviews, and previous research, some explanations and speculations for this moderator effect will be given.

High Cultural Distance Moderation

As discussed, students who studied abroad in a highly culturally distant country

had a more difficult reentry. Reasons as to why have been discussed, but why would reentry be difficult regardless of positiveness of experience? One possible explanation is that those who studied abroad in a higher cultural distance had a more encapsulated experience, and a harder time adapting upon returning home. An encapsulated experience refers to the idea that their experience abroad relates very little to their life at home, and seems isolated within the frame of their life. Adaptation, in this case, refers to both adjustments to culture and lifestyle and moving on after returning home. These two factors of an encapsulated experience and increased adjustments play into reentry from a high culturally distant country, regardless of positiveness.

Additionally, there could be two groups within the high cultural distance students. There could be students who had high positiveness and difficult reentry, and students who had low positiveness and difficult reentry. Levels of positiveness could add additional challenges, along with the previously discussed factors. Those who had high positiveness might have had a hard time because it was such an enjoyable period of life and the loss of that era was difficult. This would include difficulties like feeling not present at home, finding someone to talk to, and feeling disconnected. On the other hand, those who had a low positiveness may have a hard time reentering because they may be recovering from an emotionally straining or stressful experience. This would include difficulties like fatigue, negative mood, and lack of processing. It is possible that these two groups occurred- that students who studied abroad in high cultural distance countries had different difficulties- but they both added up to a difficult reentry.

Another idea is that those who studied abroad in a culturally distant area adapted to the customs of their place of sojourn. Because the culture was so different from their

own, they had to make many changes to thrive in that country. Because they had made so many adjustments, they would have to make more adjustments at home. Moving away from the habits and customs they had developed over their time abroad may result in more reentry difficulty.

Medium Cultural Distance Moderation

For the group of students who studied abroad in a moderately culturally distant location, reentry difficulty increased as positiveness increased. Possible explanations for this occurrence are in reflection of the high cultural distance group.

Students who had a very positive experience abroad are likely to have immersed themselves in the culture. Part of this immersion is adaptation, and when one makes adaptations abroad, they must adapt again when coming home. Perhaps the students in this group who had a very positive experience abroad had immersed themselves in and adapted to the culture, and those who had a less positive experience did not adapt. As previously discussed, a need to re-adapt to home life would play into reentry difficulty. Thus, students who adapted to a moderately culturally distant country might have had a more difficult reentry; so reentry difficulty would increase as positiveness increased, with positiveness functioning as a result of adaptation.

Low Cultural Distance Moderation

When there was a low cultural distance, students who had a more positive experience had a less difficult reentry, and those who had a less positive experience had a more difficult reentry. When cultural distance is low, adaptation is a less relevant issue, emotion is the bigger factor. Considering adaptation, reentry from a culturally similar area should flow more easily into home life than reentry from a culturally distant

area. So students reentering from a culturally similar area would struggle less with the effects of an encapsulated experience. This would make difficulties such as feeling disconnected, struggling to find someone to listen, and not feeling present less strong. With adaptation relatively easy and lessening behavioral and cognitive challenges, emotion is what remains as the chief variable.

Likely, students who had a positive experience have a resulting high mood. They come home from an incredible experience, can integrate and relate it to their home life with relative ease, and move on. The lasting good mood from a positive experience allows them to have a less difficult reentry. However, students who had a less positive experience may have dealt with some negative emotions abroad, and are continuing to experience these negative emotions at home. Since their time abroad easily integrates with their home life, they may find themselves dwelling on a negative experience instead of letting it go and moving on. These may be some factors behind students who had a less positive experience have a more difficult reentry.

The moderator effect between cultural distance, positiveness, and reentry difficulty is certainly complex. Educated guesses can provide speculation as to why this occurred, but more research is needed to tease apart the differences between each group.

Positive and Negative Affect

A more detailed analysis of participant responses to the PANAS may shed light on the key components of mood upon reentry. A bar graph of the adapted PANAS results can be seen in figure 1. Any emotions below 2.5 ("A little" or "Very slightly or not at all") were not considered significant. These included distressed, irritable, nervous,

ashamed, guilty, and unaccepted. On a spectrum, these emotions would probably be the most negative emotions of those included on the PANAS. This idea that students do not often experience the strongest negative emotions comes alongside the fact that the results of the present study show that in general, the negative emotions were not strongly experienced (none reached 4 or above on the 5 point scale) illustrate the point that though reentry is significant, it is not an overly traumatic and negative experience.

It is surprising to see how strongly participants identified with positive emotions. In the literature, reentry is illustrated as a very negative experience (Oberg, 1960; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Sahin, 1990). The PANAS results seem to contradict that, with some of the highest scoring items being accepted, excited, joyful, and inspired. A probable explanation for this is that while students are experiencing difficult transitions, they also have a leftover sort of “high” from the trip. When asked to identify her strongest emotion upon returning, one student described feeling “carefree...I just felt like I was so happy to be back and that I had that experience, that I got to travel.” Students who have this residual “high” are still rejoicing in the fact that they were able to experience an exciting and diverse trip. They also may still be absorbing the growth that occurred while abroad, and eager to explore how they can apply it at home. One returnee supported this statement with “I don’t know what changes [occurred] exactly I made but I can see them in daily life.” Another contributed his growth abroad to feelings that continued at home of “gaining confidence... Something along the nature of pride. Being comfortable with my abilities. Feeling successful, accomplished. I know I can do it”. Additionally, these positive emotions may relate to enthusiasm to be home. In general, though the transition may be difficult, being surrounded by welcoming loved

ones, applying new growth, and reflecting on an exciting trip can put a student in a mindset where they are thriving. Several students pulled this idea together when describing positive emotions upon their arrival home: “if ever you haven’t felt loved, leave for a long time and then come back”, “Once I got home I was so happy to see my family and immediately see my friends- it was too good. It was perfect”.

As discussed in the materials section, some items were added to the PANAS. These items were bored, accepted, joyful, unaccepted, disappointed, confused, disconnected, present, relieved, content, and distracted. Several of these added items were strongly experienced- accepted, joyful, disconnected, present, content, and distracted all scored a mean above 3 on the Likert scale. The high rankings of the items accepted, joyful, and content support the previous idea of students thriving upon return.

The emotions distracted and present have an interesting relationship. In previous literature, some returnees have expressed feeling as though their trip never happened, and the items present and distracted were intended to evaluate whether or not most students identify with this statement. Students seem to experience feelings both of being present, and of being distracted. Another idea is that there is raging ambivalence about being home-strong feelings of being home, yet strong memories and processing of study abroad experience, both at the same time. Many students reflected feeling like their trip did not happen and their life at home was so different, and remember spending lots of time looking at pictures and watching videos to remind themselves it did indeed occur, stating things like “ it’s like a dream. Especially the first bit [of reentry]. That was super strange. You keep looking at your pictures. The other day I went on google maps and I looked at my house and my daily walk [abroad] and went ‘oh I guess I did do that’.

As long as I can picture it, it feels real". Another student stated "the first day I was back I was lying in bed and thinking 'What the heck happened?'. It was 26 days, seriously, I got 6 hours of sleep a night maybe, I was always doing something, school friends or travelling, it still doesn't feel like it happened. I have to look at videos to show myself that it actually happened."

These feelings of being both present at home yet disconnected from experience at home as well as being still dominantly in one's life abroad yet disconnected from one's life abroad seem to oppose each other, but perhaps students feel each one in different situations. This study did not examine specifically what students felt disconnected from, but it could be the separation from their home world or the world they experienced abroad, both in culture, identity, and relational closeness. As stated, several of the items added to the PANAS were some of the highest scoring items. Because these items were added based on hypothesized emotions in the literature, along with student reflections, this data supports that the literature has correctly identified many of these emotions.

These PANAS results provide some hard data for the hypothesized emotions. The biggest discrepancy between the emotions described in the reentry literature and the PANAS results seem to be the highly rated positive emotions. To evaluate how much reentry varies from the general public, a comparison was run between the college student subjects used when the PANAS was being established and the current reentry PANAS results (figure 3). In this comparison, positive affect is nearly identical between those in reentry and the norm group, but negative affect is slightly lower (there is an approximate distance of .4 on the 1-5 Likert scale). This again supports the idea that

reentry is a difficult process, but for most students is not paralyzing. There are some adjustment challenges, but generally students are still feeling positive emotions. It is important to note that since the reentry PANAS scale was adapted, these results are not completely comparable; however they are examining the same general idea of affect through evaluating specific emotions.

Reentry Scale

A more detailed analysis of participant responses to the Reentry Scale items may also give a richer understanding of their process of reentry. A bar graph of the Reentry Scale results can be seen in figure 2. The Reentry Scale had much more balanced results than the PANAS. On the 5 point Likert Scale with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult, the lowest item was rated at an average of 2.5 and the highest an average of 4.

Loss and Adjustment

Within this small range, the items which were rated to be least difficult were reestablishing relationships with friends and family at home, engaging in hobbies and activities at home, interacting at social events, finding someone to listen to study abroad experience, changing behavior to suit social norms, and maintaining personal growth. Many of these factors (reestablishing relationships, engaging in hobbies, changing behavior to suit social norms, and interacting at social events) all relate to integration into the home community. It seems that re-adapting to previously known situations at home is fairly easy for most students, as one student said, “On the way back I had less adjustments than on the way there [because I knew what to expect at home]”. In in-depth interviews, some returning students have expressed difficulty accepting changes

that have happened in their loved ones while they were away, saying “[It was difficult] realizing that everyone here, their lives didn’t pause. I knew that they weren’t going to obviously, but at the same time you kind of think that everything is going to be 100% back to normal”. However, the results of the Reentry Scale seem to contradict this, showing that for the most part reconnecting with loved ones is moderately easy.

Perhaps there is some ambivalence here. It is possible that adjusting to factors of home life are easy for students because they were things students missed while abroad; they may have missed their friends, family, usual hobbies and social events while sojourning. An eagerness to participate in these interactions and activities may have made engaging in them easier. In general, these high ratings show that students did not have much difficulty taking up home-based activities.

The items rated as most difficult included leaving the pace of life, maintaining relationships from abroad, leaving friends from abroad, finding the level of intensity at home that was experienced abroad, and accepting the study abroad experience had ended. A pattern arises here; these difficulties relate to leaving behind the important features of the study abroad experience. The relationships and lifestyle experienced while sojourning are unique to the study abroad experience, and difficult to find at home. One student described her lifestyle abroad: “I had classes two days a week, I travelled every weekend. Always seeing something new and meeting new people. Always doing things, submerging myself in the culture...the pace of life... is so different”. This lifestyle was very contrasting to her fast paced and demanding life at college. Many students experience this contrast, and there seems to be a void where that exciting lifestyle was.

The Reentry Scale items that students rated as most difficult seem to relate to

the loss of the study abroad experience. As discussed, for most students study abroad is viewed as life-changing. Clearly, when a time like this has ended, there would be a significant let-down. This let-down seems to almost be characterized as loss. In interviews, students expressed emotions concurrence to loss including devastated and numb. The results of the Reentry Scale provide evidence for loss of experience as a powerful force in reentry.

The Reentry Scale results provide hard data for hypothesized difficulties found in the literature. Some hypothesized issues were strongly supported, but none were totally refuted. Because reentry is different for every student, it is fair to say that each of these difficulties is experienced by someone. The fact that reentry experiences are diverse and vary greatly is due to different students experiencing different difficulties.

In addition to providing hard data, the results of this part of the current study reveal an important distinction of two processes active in reentry. Two separate challenges students encounter upon reentry are the loss of the study abroad experience and the adjustment to home life. The loss of the study abroad experience is generally more strenuously difficult than the adjustment to home life.

Connection of PANAS and Reentry Scale

The adapted PANAS can be brought alongside the Reentry Scale to further support the division of difficulty between loss of study abroad and adjustment to home. Some of the strongly experienced positive emotions (accepted, excited, and proud) can easily be applied to adjustment to home. Students may feel accepted by loved ones, excited to reconnect with their home life, and proud of the experience they had and proud to share it with others. One student explained her positive affect during reentry,

“[Now I’m back to] real life and it makes you think- what can I take away from this?

When I was there I thought I want to stay here forever and now being back I’ve seen no, this is reality”. She describes having some sadness to leave, but ultimately

implementing the growth she made abroad into her home life and feeling content.

Some of the highly experienced negative emotions (disconnected, distracted) reflect the loss of the experience abroad. Students may feel disconnected from their friends and experiences from abroad, and distracted from their home life by still being absorbed in their life-changing experience. One student who spent 5 weeks in Spain reflects:

“All I could think of was Spain, everything to me was Spain, Barcelona, that’s all I wanted. I think at least for my dad who I was around most the first day or two it got annoying, so I had to try to think about other stuff and try to distance myself from the thought of I just went to Spain and it was amazing, to just regular life, and not annoy everybody, and that was difficult, because that’s all I really cared about at the time. It was difficult because I could tell I was getting on people’s nerves.”

This interviewee clearly explains the state of still being mentally abroad once returned home. The moderately experienced emotions could reflect the intersection of these two difficulties- for example, a student may feel bored (rated a 2.8) due to their adjustment to the more familiar situations at home, and the lack of novelty and excitement they experienced abroad. Another example would be confusion (rated a 2.6) due to experiencing ambivalent feelings like an eagerness to be home and reconnect along with the sadness of no longer being abroad. Students shared this idea with responses like “I was definitely excited coming home. Hearing ‘this and this happened’,

but kind of let down a little bit” and “I was really excited and ready to come back, but at the same time they don’t tell you as much of the effects as the sad part, the recovery part... it’s shocking”.

The two scales also come together to reflect that there may be some general themes to reentry. Some students seem to be well adjusted, experiencing moderate difficulties but maintaining positive emotions. Others seem to experience strenuous difficulties and negative emotions. An additional group seems to be ambivalent, experiencing a little of both. When melded together, these groups present a sample which reflects the common emotional and behavioral difficulties in reentry. Some emotions and difficulties continue to be significantly stronger than the rest, but the sample reflects a wide range of experienced issues. Future research aimed at understanding these groups would be enlightening.

Conclusion

The W-Curve

The present study partially supports and partially challenges the W-curve. The W-curve is largely based upon reverse culture shock, which would be manifested in intense difficulties adjusting to the home culture. The Reentry Scale did not support this, with home integration being moderately easy for most students. The difficulties students report have less to do with specific clashes with American cultural norms upon their return than with the recognition of loss of a very special, possibly once in a lifetime experience of living and studying in a different culture.

On the other hand, the moderation effect of cultural distance seems to imply that

cultural features of both the U.S. and the host cultures pose challenges to the study abroad student. If students adapt to a culture that is quite different from home, then returning home may, indeed, provoke “reverse culture shock.” These findings support the concept that culture is a crucial variable in reentry difficulty, coinciding with the W-curve.

Additionally, the strongly experienced emotions can easily fit the different stages of the W-curve- the honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. Positive emotions upon return actually seem to be higher than negative emotions, which coincides with the W-curve having more moderately positive stages and just one highly negative stage.

Interviewees were asked if they identified with the W-curve. Though responses are obviously quite subjective, the reflections do offer insight. One student describes her experience as closely following the W-curve model:

“It was hard when I first got there, as I got accepted, went to orientation- realized this is actually happening- when you’re packing you go ‘woah I’m leaving tomorrow’- on the plane going ‘what am I doing, what am I getting myself into?’ It was super exciting meeting people but it was a little low because it was holiday so none of the students were there. I didn’t know what stuff I could use, how to buy food- we got a tour but were left to ourselves. It was go go go right away- we didn’t know how many students would be there, everyone was gone, that was hard. It grew and grew and then I felt so great, ‘I’m in Germany I’m travelling I’m learning it’s great’. There are times when you go ‘what am I doing here?’ because it gets lonely, stuck in your room, local people go home. I couldn’t access playing music; there was no way to outlet. I hit a low point and then I was

getting excited to go home, then [when I arrived home] I hid in my house the first few days, and then it got exciting.”

However, other students had less of a concurrent course, saying the W-curve did not match with their experience, “I can see how others would relate to this, but I don’t relate. Mostly because I was never homesick”. Most students identified at least partially with the W-curve, “give or take a few loops in timing”, or named specific points they did not experience: “When I got home, there was never really a celebration, I felt an ‘oh, I’m back’”.

Whether this study refutes or supports the W-curve, the more important point is that it adds details. In a collection of literature flooded with hypothesized and anecdotal information, there is now more hard data. This study has uncovered which emotions and issues students actually identify with, and how strongly they identify with those emotions. While the W-curve identifies that students will most likely experience difficulties abroad and when returning to home, the present study can help explain what will be difficult about the return, and how students may feel during their return.

General Gains in Understanding Reentry

This study uncovers much detailed information about reentry. There are several major findings which seem to be the most significant factors. First, the data provides evidence for reentry as a legitimate process. Across the sample, participants agreed that they had experienced the described difficulties to some degree. This consistency in experienced difficulties shows that there are themes to reentry. The elevated negative affect, along with the common

difficulties, show that reentry is significant enough to be considered a psychological process. It is an experience unique to students returning home from a study abroad program and presents unique difficulties and emotional processes.

Secondly, through the synthesis of the PANAS and Reentry Scale results, we can see that reentry is something that is difficult for students, but for the most part, not tremendously so. Though negative affect is slightly higher when compared with a control sample, positive affect is as just as high. There are significant difficulties for students, but none of them were, on average, extremely difficult.

Finally, the current research breaks down the difficulty of reentry into two facets: adjustment to home, and loss of study abroad experience. The mourning of the loss of the study abroad experience seems to be more difficult than the adjustment to home life. The two also seem to interact to produce additional difficulties and emotional challenges. Reentry is clearly a complex process, but identifying these two major categories is a crucial gain.

Limitations

This study presents a variety of limitations. The largest limitation is the lack of gender balance of participants as there were only 13 males. The results showed no significant differences in reentry difficulty and gender, but perhaps a larger sample would show a difference. Reentry also may present different issues to females than to males, and it is possible that this study more strongly reflects reentry for females. Additionally, there was a limited population

geographically. Because many of the participants were recruited from reentry sessions at a university, many were living in that geographic region. This specific university is located in a small town often described as being dull, and this could affect reentry difficulty as students often spend time abroad in more stimulating places.

A surprising demographic was that the average perceived positiveness of study abroad experience was 88 out of 100. The participants in this study had a very positive experience abroad. This could skew the reentry difficulty and experienced emotions. A sample with greater variability in perceived positiveness might show different results.

Further Directions

Though this study does uncover some important facets of reentry, more research on the topic is clearly needed. The correlations need to be further explored, even greater detail is needed regarding behavioral difficulties, and there is a need to tease apart of the loss of study abroad experience and adjustments at home. The moderator effect between cultural distance, positiveness, and reentry difficulty needs more detailed data and analyses to satisfy unanswered questions. There are also other areas to explore to further understand the reentry phenomenon.

One interesting take would be to examine if there are any patterns in certain personality types and reentry difficulty. For example it would be fascinating to use Costa & McCrae's Big-Five Personality Inventory (1992) to examine if perhaps those who show more neuroticism have more difficulty with

reentry, and if those who show more openness and agreeableness have less difficulty with reentry. Many other personality factors could be explored.

A longitudinal approach would be appropriate to further evaluate emotions associated with reentry. It would be valuable to examine which emotions are experienced at what time. A study like this could examine if the actual W-curve shape happens, and how steep the W is, and if there is a chronological pattern.

Another direction could be exploring what factors come into play in specific kinds of study abroad trips. Examples include mission trips and service-learning trips, and internship centered trips. Comparing and contrasting different kinds of trips and the associated difficulties and emotions may provide more details on what students experience. It could also be examined how much the degree of immersion- how much interaction students have with their host country- relates to reentry. It could also be explored if those who have prior experience travelling have less difficulty with reentry, and if the length and type of reentry training relates to reentry difficulty.

Practical Application

The in-depth knowledge gained from this study regarding what emotions and difficulties students encounter in reentry can help students in a practical setting. Reentry workshops, conferences, and resources can use such information to help students prepare for the transition. Also, if students are struggling with reentry, having detailed information about common difficulties can help them feel that they are not alone in their struggles. Reentry resources should take advantage of information such as this to help their students

understand reentry and aide them in what they are going through.

Research like this can also aide the general public of individuals who interact with reentering students. Knowing what students are going through can help those who interact with them know how to better offer support.

Final Remarks

This study strived to fill in some blanks on information available on reentry, and made some expected and some unexpected connections. It is hoped that we will see the literature available on study abroad reentry continue to grow, and awareness of this topic to increase.

Reflection

In spring 2011, a friend of mine returned from five months of studying and travelling in Central America. Normally we communicated daily, so while she was abroad she wrote me a series of letters that read as a journal. I received it in chunks throughout her trip, and was able to walk through her journey with her. I could see the challenges she was facing and the way she was growing.

When she returned, she was not the same. The way she perceived her family, friends, community, education, beliefs-- nearly every facet of life-- had changed, and this changed the way she interacted with her life. It was interesting, frustrating, eye-opening, and heartbreaking to see my friend go through this adjustment. As I began to talk about this issue with people, I learned that others had friends and family who had had difficult transitions after studying abroad, and some had even experienced this challenge themselves. What my friend was going through was not an isolated incident.

The following summer, several months after my friend's return, I went on a 12 week service trip in Yellowstone National Park. I lived and worked with 26 students from various Universities around the United States. It was an amazing experience and I noticed my perceptions begin to change and affect my life. My transition home was very difficult. I was happy to be with friends and family, but I desperately missed the lifestyle and community I had in Yellowstone. I thought often about how I could reconcile the personal growth I'd made while away with my home life. Eventually I felt like I had to let go-- accept the experience was over and moving forward-- but I still think of Yellowstone often.

That fall, a month after I had returned, it was time to start thinking about my honors thesis. After bumbling around with a few topics, I began to realize that what I was going through would be relevant. What I had seen my friend go through would be relevant. I could learn more about why this transition was difficult, and what was difficult about it. I decided to dive into reentry research, and it has been a great journey in which I have greatly developed as a student, psychology minded individual, and writer.

I was honored to present my research at the Oregon Academy of Science and Western Psychological Association conferences, as well as WOU's Academic

Excellence Showcase. Through oral and poster presentations, I got to hear others thoughts on reentry and gain new perspectives, as well as develop greater communication and understanding about my project.

In the summer of 2013, after nearly two years of research on reentry, I spent the season working at a camp, which included 10 full weeks of intense community, demanding work, and a very unique lifestyle. When camp was over and I left this community, I knew I would go through reentry. As I drove away from camp and observed myself going through the emotions I had been studying for the last 20 months, I noticed knowing all about reentry didn't make it any easier. However, it was so interesting to observe in myself for a second time going through the process I had been studying in others for so long. I felt it really helped fulfill my understanding of reentry.

There are several individuals who have helped me greatly with this project. Firstly, I would like to thank the participants who took time out of their schedules to complete a survey, or sit down for an interview. Many of them gave so much of themselves and opened up about memories and experiences. This project truly couldn't have happened without them. I want to thank Dr. Gavin Keulks, director of the honors program at WOU, who helped me get excited about this project and provided support, direction, and encouragement throughout. I'd like to thank my friends who travelled to WPA with me (this included an 11 hour drive through the night!) I'd also like to thank the Study Abroad Office at WOU who allowed me to attend reentry sessions to recruit students, and also provided insight and direction in the early stages of this project. Finally, the person whom I'd like to recognize the most is my advisor for this project, Dr. Vic Savicki. This project would definitely not be what it is today without his input. Dr. Savicki was a mentor through all stages of this project- from brain storming to presentations to final edits. I am honored to have done research alongside him.

In the midst of the portion of my research that included interviewing students who had gone through reentry, I came across a quote By Miriam Adeney that really struck me: "You will never be completely at home again, because part of your heart always will be elsewhere. That is the price you pay for the richness of loving and knowing people in more than one place." I greatly identify with this quote, and I believe many of the individuals who participated in my research would as well. I think reentry is so unique

and difficult because another place really has become home. Home is no longer just where you've spent the majority of your life, but other homes have formed in the heart of one who has lived and loved elsewhere.

I would describe this project as enlightening, challenging, and fulfilling. It has been a marathon the last two years and it is hard to believe that it is finished. But just as another place where one has experienced life lives on with them, I think this project will live on with me even when I am no longer working on it. It will always affect the way I perceive the world when I travel and when I meet others who are in transitions. I am very thankful to have had this opportunity.

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Appendix

Tables

Table 1 Cultural Distance score distribution.

Cultural Distance				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.11	3	3.7	4.8	4.8
.40	3	3.7	4.8	9.5
1.40	3	3.7	4.8	14.3
2.70	2	2.5	3.2	17.5
3.10	1	1.2	1.6	19.0
8.10	6	7.4	9.5	28.6
8.20	4	4.9	6.3	34.9
8.30	1	1.2	1.6	36.5
8.40	1	1.2	1.6	38.1
10.40	7	8.6	11.1	49.2
13.20	1	1.2	1.6	50.8
Valid 14.60	4	4.9	6.3	57.1
14.90	4	4.9	6.3	63.5
18.70	6	7.4	9.5	73.0
19.40	4	4.9	6.3	79.4
20.10	1	1.2	1.6	81.0
20.80	1	1.2	1.6	82.5
21.80	4	4.9	6.3	88.9
22.00	1	1.2	1.6	90.5
23.90	1	1.2	1.6	92.1
25.20	2	2.5	3.2	95.2
25.60	3	3.7	4.8	100.0
Total	63	77.8	100.0	
Missing System	18	22.2		
Total	81	100.0		

Table 2 Cultural Distance Calculations

Cultural Distance Calculations				
	Power Difference	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism/Collectivism	Career/Quality of Life
US	40	46	91	62
Greece	60	112	35	57
Austria	11	70	55	79
Italy	50	75	76	70
Spain	57	86	51	42
UK	35	35	89	66
France	68	86	71	43
Germany	35	65	67	66
Canada	39	48	80	52
Japan	54	92	46	95
Taiwan	58	69	17	45
South Korea	60	85	18	39
Mexico	81	82	30	69
Brazil	69	76	38	49
East Africa	64	52	27	41
Arab countries	80	68	38	53
Argentina	49	74	46	56
Mexico	81	82	30	69
Cape Verde, East Africa	64	52	27	41
Ecuador	78	67	8	63
New Zealand	22	49	79	58
Kenya, West Africa	77	54	20	46
New Guinea, Indonesia	78	48	14	46
Australia	36	51	90	61
Costa Rica	35	86	15	21
India	72	40	48	56
Salvador	66	94	19	40
South Africa	49	49	65	66
Thailand	64	64	40	34
Peru	64	87	45	42
Senegal	77	54	40	46
Turkey	66	85	37	45
Denmark	18	23	74	16
Norway	31	50	69	8
Mean	53	65	53	49
SD	22	24	53	18
High	104	112	91	95
Low	11	8	6	5
Variance	93	104	85	90

Figure 1

Demographics

Study Abroad Re-Entry: Emotional Aspects

Please fill in the blanks.

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Class Standing: _____

What country did you study abroad in: _____

Level of fluency in host culture language: _____

Length of trip: _____

Length of time since return: _____

Living situation abroad (i.e. host family): _____

Please circle.

Enrolled in program:

Independently

With other students from my university

With students from my state or geographic region

Other

Please explain.

Have you participated in a formal reentry activity (class, workshop, meeting, etc.)? If you have participated in a formal reentry activity, how long was it?

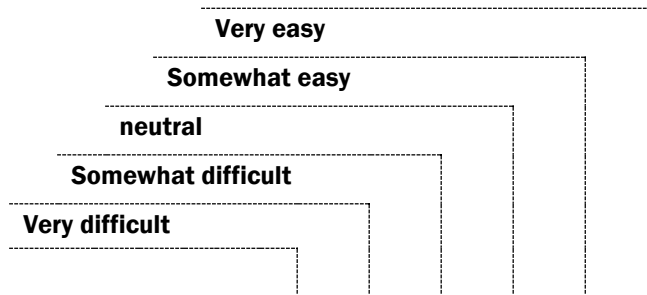
Fill in the blank.

Using the following scale, please choose a number from 1 to 100 to rate your overall study abroad experience. 1= Extremely negative, 25=Somewhat Negative, 50=Neutral, 75=Somewhat positive, 100=Extremely positive.

Figure 2

Behaviors Experienced in Re-Entry

This scale describes a number of behaviors associated with the re-entry transition. Thinking back on your feelings during re-entry, please indicate the difficulty you experienced with each factor.



1. Changing behaviour to suit social norms back home	1	2	3	4	5
2. Leaving the pace of life in study abroad country	1	2	3	4	5
3. Readapting to the pace of life at home	1	2	3	4	5
4. Re-establishing relationships with home family and friends	1	2	3	4	5
5. Maintaining relationships with friends from abroad	1	2	3	4	5
6. Engaging in hobbies and activities from abroad	1	2	3	4	5
7. Engaging in hobbies and activities from home	1	2	3	4	5
8. Interacting at social events	1	2	3	4	5
9. Leaving host country friends	1	2	3	4	5
10. Sharing study abroad experience with friends and family	1	2	3	4	5
11. Finding level of intensity at home that you experienced abroad	1	2	3	4	5
12. Re-entering school life in the U.S.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Accepting American values	1	2	3	4	5

14. Leaving values of host country	1	2	3	4	5
15. Finding someone to listen to your experience	1	2	3	4	5
16. Accepting your study abroad experience had ended	1	2	3	4	5
17. Maintaining personal growth gained while abroad	1	2	3	4	5
18. Maintaining personal balance in day to day life back home	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 3

Emotions Experienced in Re-Entry

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Thinking back on your feelings since you came back from your study abroad, please indicate to what extent you have felt this way during your readjustment to living in the U.S.

1. distressed	1	2	3	4	5
2. irritable	1	2	3	4	5
3. nervous	1	2	3	4	5
4. bored	1	2	3	4	5
5. accepted	1	2	3	4	5
6. excited	1	2	3	4	5

7. ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
8. joyful	1	2	3	4	5
9. guilty	1	2	3	4	5
10. unaccepted	1	2	3	4	5
11. disappointed	1	2	3	4	5
12. confused	1	2	3	4	5
13. disconnected	1	2	3	4	5
14. interested	1	2	3	4	5
15. present	1	2	3	4	5
16. proud	1	2	3	4	5
17. inspired	1	2	3	4	5
18. relieved	1	2	3	4	5
19. content	1	2	3	4	5
20. distracted	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 4- Interview Questions

1. How did you feel about returning home?
2. Which was stronger- the urge to go home or the urge to stay?
3. Was your experience abroad more positive or negative?
4. Was returning home more positive or negative?
5. What was the biggest adjustment upon returning home?
6. What was your strongest emotion in returning?
7. How did you personally change while abroad? Have you changed since your return? Have those changes carried out in your home life?
8. After being fully re-immersed in home life some travelers say they feel like their trip never happened, what is your reaction to this?
9. Do you feel you have fully processed your experience abroad?
10. What is your reaction to the W-curve?

shown in figure 2, demonstrates that in reentry, negative affect was slightly higher than for the norm population, but that positive affect is about the same. This shows that for most students, reentry is difficult, but not extremely so. Further explanation and analysis of the PANAS results will be included in the discussion.

Figure 1, PANAS results based on means.

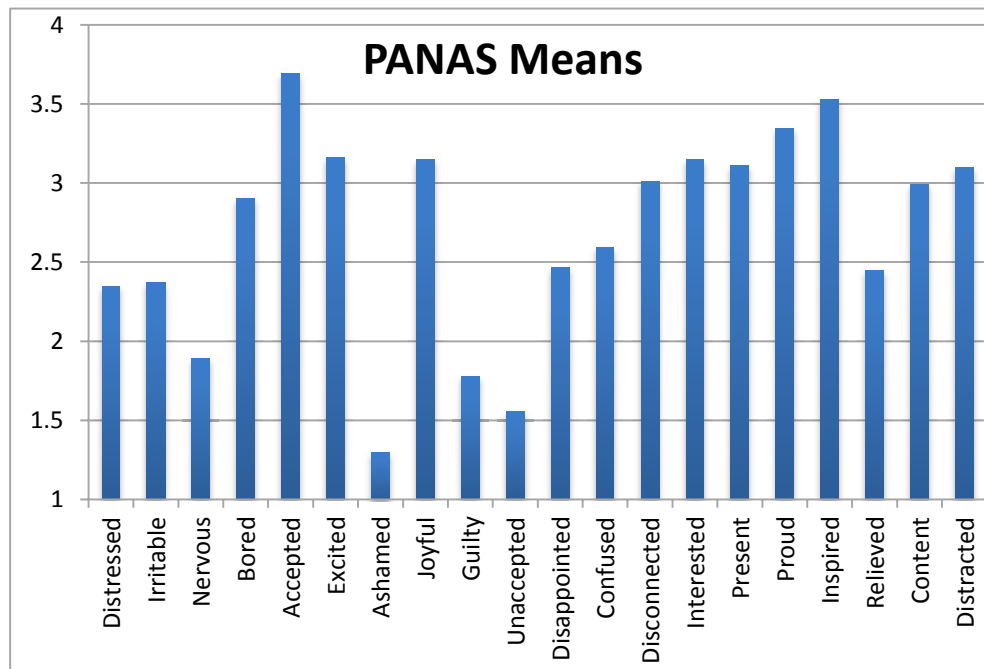
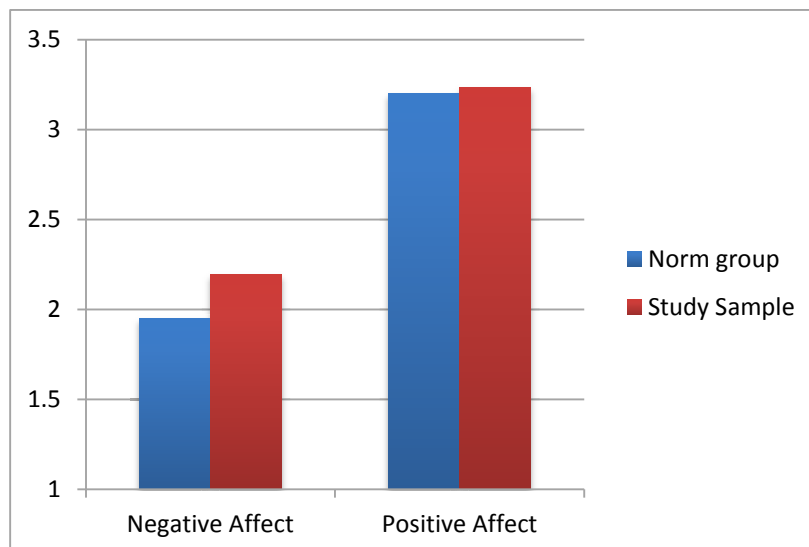


Figure 2, PANAS norm and Reentry comparison.



Reentry Scale Review

Reentry scale results showed a less variation between means than the adapted PANAS, with the mean scores ranging from 2.5 to 3.9, see figure 3 below. The highest experienced difficulties were leaving the pace of life of the study abroad country, maintaining relationships from abroad, leaving host country friends, and accepting the study abroad experience had ended. The difficulties rated less straining were adapting behavior to social norms back home, adapting to the pace of life at home, engaging in hobbies and activities from home, and interacting at social events. The difficulties in the Reentry Scale results seem to fall into two categories- loss of the study abroad experience and adjustment to home life. This will be examined in the discussion.

Figure 3, Reentry results by means.

